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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 06 MADRID 000799

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [KISL](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [UNFPA](#) [CIA](#) [SA](#) [SP](#)  
SUBJECT: WORLD MUSLIM LEAGUE INTER-FAITH CONFERENCE HELD IN  
MADRID JULY 16-18

REF: A. (A) STATE 72693  
[1](#)B. (B) RIYADH 1090

MADRID 00000799 001.2 OF 006

Classified By: DCM Hugo Llorens for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY. The World Muslim League, under the patronage of Saudi King Abdullah, held its Inter-faith Conference in Madrid July 16-18. King Juan Carlos hosted the inaugural ceremonies at the Pardo Palace. Although the guest list could not be described as all-inclusive, there was a range of participation including Sikh, Buddhist, Hindu and Shinto. While the participant roster did not list any Israeli attendees and news reports in advance of conference questioned whether or not Israelis would be invited, at least one guest who self-identified as Israeli received an invitation. The original conference agenda did not include any women as presenters or panelists and in response to comments from the participants, organizers added a woman to the final panel. U.S. participants who shared their impressions expressed satisfaction with the event as a small step in the right direction on the part of the World Muslim League. Participants reportedly refrained from political commentary, although several Muslim speakers did make personal statements calling for action to ensure that religion could not be defamed. The World Muslim League's Madrid Declaration was not circulated for review by participants during the conference, nor was the declaration discussed or approved by the participants. It was read during the closing session and only appeared in the press room after the conference's conclusion. The Declaration calls for working groups to be formed and more meetings to be held, without any specific timetable. It does call for a special UN session on dialogue as soon as possible. The conference declaration says that the Conference on Dialogue should send a delegation to the UN session on dialogue with membership selected by the World Muslim League. The text of the World Muslim League's Madrid Declaration follows in paragraph 10. More details about the conference are available at the website [www.world-dialogue.org](http://www.world-dialogue.org). END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (C) The World Muslim League, under the patronage of Saudi King Abdullah, held its Inter-faith Conference in Madrid July 16-18. Spanish King Juan Carlos acted as a host for the event. Initially, Spanish MFA officials informed the Embassy the week of July 7 that the only Spanish government involvement would be through the King's protocol staff planning a small lunch at the Pardo Palace (Blair House-equivalent) to honor King Abdullah. The Chief of Staff to Deputy FM Lossada confirmed to Embassy that the conference was a "purely Saudi" event. The Spanish King did extend all courtesies to his counterpart and the conference opening

ceremonies were held at Pardo, attended by King Juan Carlos, King Abdullah, and Secretary General of the World Muslim League Abdullah in Abdul Mohsin al-Turki, along with guests including President Zapatero, FM Moratinos, former British PM Tony Blair, Saudi FM Saud al-Faisal, Prince Bandar bin Sultan, Cardinal Tauran, Jesse Jackson and others. DCM attended the conference opening and said that King Abdullah received a standing ovation after his address focusing on brotherhood and the common denominators that unite us all. Based on the close personal rapport evident between the Spanish and Saudi Kings during the event, Juan Carlos clearly recognizes the importance of the Saudi bilateral relationship and has forged strong ties with his counterpart. His personal exhibit of tolerance extended to letting the Saudi protocol and security details run roughshod over some of the attendees. Given that King Juan Carlos runs his own show, he bristled to see some of his guests brusquely handled by the Saudi team in the Spanish palace. The event did not receive much local coverage after King Juan Carlos' participation in the inauguration, but Spanish public opinion celebrated the event as an effort to strengthen peace, dialogue and cooperation. The event also tied in with Spain's interest in expanding its ties with Saudi Arabia, particularly when Saudi oil revenues could help inject some needed cash to Spanish construction and energy enterprises. The conference also fit in Spain's plan to expand its diplomatic outreach to the Middle East, including its stated intention to hold a major Middle East conference during Spain's EU Presidency in 2010.

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CONFERENCE PARTICIPANTS  
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13. (U) Participants characterized the conference as disorganized and the agenda, speakers and logistics shifted

MADRID 00000799 002.2 OF 006

each day, with the Saudi Embassy in Madrid unable to share any advance details. The organizers responded to comments during the first two days in which participants noted that there were no women speaking on any of the conference panels and very few women were invited to attend. On the last day's final panel, the organizers added a Spanish Muslim, Mekia Nedjar, to address the audience on role of women in inter-faith dialogue. Ms. Nedjar, who specializes in intercultural mediation and translation services told Poloff that she was asked to participate only the night before and rather than giving a prepared address, as the other speakers, simply shared her personal reflections. Participants said they received between one day and two weeks advance notice of the event so everyone had scrambled to adjust their schedules and respond to the Saudi's invitation. U.S. participants speculated they received their invitations based on previous participation in other inter-faith conferences or through contacts at the Saudi Embassy in Washington or business contacts such as Abdullah Ali Reza. The guest list included representatives of a wide variety of religious faiths, including Sikh, Hindu, Buddhist, and Shinto, but the level of representation reflected the hasty organization of the proceedings. The participants list did not indicate the presence of agnostics or atheists. A final participants list or contact information sheet was not distributed to attendees. NGOs did not play a formal role in the conference, although participants were affiliated with NGOs in some cases. Alliance of Civilizations High Representative Jorge Sampaio had a schedule conflict and sent a representative to read a prepared statement on July 18.

14. (C) Author Robert Lacey, working on his new book, "Inside The Kingdom" told Poloff he received his invitation through connections with Saudi businessperson Khalid Ali Reza. Lacey said he had watched extensive Saudi television coverage of the event before he departed KSA for Madrid and thought that the event was an important milestone for the Saudi establishment, especially since he saw at least two members of the Saudi Ulema and the head of the Majlis al-

Shura at the opening ceremony. Just getting members of the Saudi religious establishment out of the Kingdom and exposed to other points of view was a step forward in his opinion. One U.S. participant described his experience, saying, "Saudis have been approaching me at the dinner hour or in the hotel elevator and asking to talk since they have never met a Jew before." Another participant said that during the receiving line at the inauguration, he introduced himself to King Abdullah as a rabbi from Jerusalem, Israel and received a warm and gracious welcome. Additionally, after the introduction, the Saudi FM gave specific instructions to a staff member for the Saudi news crew to interview the Israeli rabbi. While the participant list did not cite any attendees from Israel and news reports in advance of conference questioned whether or not Israelis would be invited, at least one guest who self-identified as Israeli was formally invited.

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CONFERENCE PROGRAM  
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15. (U) After the inauguration and speeches by King Abdullah, King Juan Carlos and Secretary General al-Turki, the rest of the conference consisted of a series of panels in which selected speakers delivered prepared remarks. A moderator then called on individuals who submitted written questions or comments to give brief remarks. Participants from the U.S. and other western countries expressed frustration at the rigid structure of the event, hoping that a dialogue conference would include focus groups or roundtable discussions that allowed more exchange of ideas.

16. (U) Instead, the conference organizers kept to the rigid format and many attendees expressed their view that the most productive discussions of the conference took place during meals or during quick coffee breaks. Participants reportedly refrained from political commentary. Several Muslim speakers did make personal statements calling for action to ensure that religion could not be defamed. Participants felt that the most interesting exchange occurred the night of July 17 when Dr. Ezzedin Mustapha Ibrahim, listed as a cultural affairs advisor in Abu Dhabi, delivered a paper on Islamic Christian dialogue from the Islamic perspective. Participants reported that Dr. Ibrahim deviated from his prepared text and commented that it might not be possible to have full dialogue between Muslims and Jews because so many political issues like Jerusalem hampered the discussion.

MADRID 00000799 003.2 OF 006

Reportedly, several audience members refuted Dr. Ibrahim's remarks, pointing out their own successful interfaith efforts that included Jews and Muslims, including in Muslim countries. Several Jewish representatives had the opportunity to present their views in response to Ibrahim's remark and more broadly. Everyone said that the exchanges were made in a respectful manner and set a better tone for the third day's agenda. As one attendee commented, "up until that point the presentations had been bland to the point of meaningless and Thursday night they finally allowed the elephant in the room and found it wouldn't squash anything." The intervention of Dr. Mustafa Ceric, Mufti of Sarajevo, was cited as particularly helpful, as he described for participants the interfaith efforts in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Reportedly, he emphasized that hate was shameful and that Muslims must understand that Jews have rights and the Jewish positions must be recognized and understood. U.S. participants who shared their impressions with Poloff expressed satisfaction with the event as a small step in the right direction on the part of the World Muslim League and said that although some of them had questioned whether or not to accept the invitation, it had been an important opportunity to open up lines of communication, with Muslims in particular, as well as an opportunity to counter misinformation and express their point of view.

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CONFERENCE AGENDA  
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¶7. (U) There was a session on religious dialogue moderated by Dr. Bawa Jain, Secretary General of the Millennium World Peace Summit. Panelists included Dialogue in Islam - Dr. Hussin Hamed Hassan - Islamic Bank of Dubai  
Dialogue in Christianity - Dr. Najeb Gabriel - Director, Egyptian Human Rights Organization  
Dialogue in Judaism - Rabbi Arthur Schneier, Appeal of Conscience Foundation  
Dialogue in Oriental Beliefs - Dr. M.M. Verma - President of Int. Dialogue Association of India

¶8. (U) There were also sessions on:  
Dialogue and its importance to Human Society moderated by Dr. Saleh Ibn Abdullah Bin Hameed, President of the Saudi Majlis al- Shura;  
Common Human Patrimony in Dialogue moderated by Dr. William Vendley, SecGen of Int. Religious Conference for Peace;  
Evaluation and Promotion of Dialogue moderated by Rabbi Claudio Epelman, Director of Jewish Congress of Latin America, Caribbean, and Argentina; and  
Promoting a Culture of Dialogue and Coexistence moderated by Dr. Ahmed Talib al-Ibrahimi, former Algerian Foreign Minister.

The closing session included presentations by the World Muslim League and Jean-Luis Tauran, President of the Pontifical Council of Inter-religious Dialogue. Finally, World Muslim League Secretary General al-Turki read a summation statement, that was later released in the press briefing room as "The Madrid Declaration."

¶9. (C) The World Muslim League's Madrid Declaration, however, was not circulated for review by participants during the conference, nor was the declaration discussed or approved by the participants. It was read during the closing session and only appeared in the press room after the conference's conclusion. The declaration is worded ambiguously so that it is open to interpretation whether the recommendations are coming from "the conference" organizers or participants. It calls for working groups to be formed and more meetings to be held, without any specific timetable. It does call for a special UN session on dialogue as soon as possible. The conference declaration says that the Conference on Dialogue should send a delegation to the UN session with membership selected by the World Muslim League.

¶10. (U) Text of Madrid Conference Declaration follows:

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TEXT OF MADRID CONFERENCE DECLARATION  
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The Madrid Declaration issued by The World Conference on Dialogue Organized by the Muslim World League in Madrid, Spain under the patronage of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Abdullah Bin Abdul Aziz Al-Saud 13 - 15 / 7 / 1429 A. H. Corresponding to 16 -18 /7/ 2008

MADRID 00000799 004.2 OF 006

Praise be to God, Lord of the Universe, and may the peace and blessings of God be upon all His prophets and messengers. In response to the invitation of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Abdullah Bin Abdul Aziz Al-Saud, the Muslim World League organized the World Conference on Dialogue in Madrid, Spain, during the period 13 to 15/ Rajab / 1429 A. H, corresponding to 16 to 18/ July / 2008.

The participants in the conference; followers of the world religions and cultures express their profound gratitude for the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Abdullah Bin Abdul Aziz Al-Saud for his generous patronage and inauguration of the conference and for his speech to the participants, which

they considered as a major document in the conference.

Furthermore, the participants extended their deep thanks and appreciation for His Majesty Juan Carlos the 1st of Spain for his comprehensive welcome speech and for H.E. Mr. Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero, the president of Spain for his participation in the opening session and for his efforts in the dialogue of civilizations. The participants also thanked the Spanish Government for having the Conference in Spain. This great country is home to an historical heritage that belongs to the followers of different religions and has contributed to human civilization.

The participants also recall the objectives of the UN Charter, which calls for exerting collective efforts aiming at the enhancement of international relations, the creation of an exemplary human community and the promotion of dialogue as a civilized way of cooperation.

The participants further remind all people of the Declaration of the UN General Assembly in 1994, which called for tolerance and the spread of the culture of peace, and also ask that they recall the declarations of 1995 as the Year of Tolerance and 2001 as the Year of Dialogue Among Civilizations.

The participants commend the Appeal of Makkah issued by the World Islamic Conference on Dialogue, which was called for by the Custodian of Two Holy Mosques and organized by the Muslim World League earlier this year (2008). The participants build on the agreement among the followers of religions and prominent cultures regarding the value of dialogue as the best way for mutual understanding and cooperation in human relations as well as in peaceful coexistence among nations.

In light of the above, the participants affirm the following principles:

1. Unity of humankind in the original creation and the equality among human beings irrespective of their colors, ethnic backgrounds and cultures.
2. Purity of the nature of humans; as they were created liking good and disliking evil inclining to justice and avoiding injustice. Such pure nature leads humans to show mercy and to seek certainty and belief.
3. Diversity of cultures and civilizations among people is a sign of God and a call for human advancement and prosperity.
4. The heavenly messages aim at realizing the obedience of people to their Creator and achieving happiness, justice, security and peace for humankind. These messages seek to enhance ways of understanding and cooperation among people despite differences in their origins, colors and languages. They also call for spreading virtue through wisdom and politeness, and rejecting extremism and terrorism.
- 5- Respecting heavenly religions, preserving their high status, condemning any insult to their symbols, and combating the exploitation of religion in the instigation of racial discrimination.
- 6- Observing peace, honoring agreements and respecting unique traditions of peoples and their right to security, freedom and self-determination are the basis for building good relations among all people. Achieving this is a major objective of all religions and prominent cultures.
- 7 - The significance of religion and moral values and the need for humans to revert to their Creator in their fight against crime, corruption, drugs, and terrorism, and in preserving the institution of the family and protecting

societies from deviant behaviors.

8- The family is the basic unit of society and its nucleus. Protecting it from disintegration is a cornerstone for any secure and stable society.

9- Dialogue is one of the essentials of life. It is also one of the 1st important means for knowing each other, cooperation, exchange of interests and realizing the truth, which contributes to the happiness of humankind.

10- The preservation of the environment and its protection from pollution and other dangers are considered a major objective of all religions and cultures.

Mindful of accomplishing the above principles through dialogue, the conference has thoroughly reviewed the process of dialogue and its obstacles, as well as the catastrophes that afflicted humanity in the 20th Century. The Conference noted that terrorism is one of the most serious obstacles confronting dialogue and coexistence.

Terrorism is a universal phenomenon that requires unified international efforts to combat it in a serious, responsible and just way. This demands an international agreement on defining terrorism, addressing its root causes and achieving justice and stability in the world.

Based on the above, the conference has adopted the following recommendations:

1- To reject theories that call for the clash of civilizations and cultures and to warn of the danger of campaigns seeking to deepen conflicts and destabilize peace and security.

2- To enhance common human values, to cooperate in their dissemination within societies and to solve the problems that hinder their achievement.

3- To disseminate the culture of tolerance and understanding through dialogue so as to be a framework for international relations through holding conferences and symposia, as well as developing relevant cultural, educational and media programs.

4- To agree on international guidelines for dialogue among the followers of religions and cultures through which moral values and ethical principles, which are common denominators among such followers, so as to strengthen stability and achieve prosperity for all humans.

5- To work on urging governmental and non-governmental organizations to issue a document that stipulates respect for religions and their symbols, the prohibition of their denigration and the repudiation of those who commit such acts.

To fulfill these desired objectives of dialogue by this conference, the participants have agreed on adopting the following:

1. Forming a working team to study the problems hindering dialogue and prevent it from realizing its desired results. Its task is also to prepare a study that provides visions for the solution of these problems and to coordinate among bodies promoting world dialogue.

2. Cooperation among religious, cultural, educational, and media establishments to deepen and consolidate ethical values, to encourage noble social practices and to confront sexual promiscuity, family disintegration and other vices.

3. Organizing inter-religious and inter-cultural meetings, conducting research, executing media programs and using the Internet and other media for the dissemination of a culture of peace, understanding and coexistence.

14. Promoting the issue of dialogue among the followers of religions, civilizations and cultures within youth, cultural, educational, and media activities.

15. Calling upon the UN General Assembly to support the results reached by this conference. It is strongly recommended to make use of these recommendations in enhancing dialogue among the followers of religions, civilizations and cultures through conducting a special UN session on dialogue.

MADRID 00000799 006.2 OF 006

The participants express their hope that the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Abdullah Bin Abdul Aziz Al-Saud will use his good office with the concerned bodies in convening this session as soon as possible. It will be the pleasure of the members of this conference to take part in that session through a representative delegation, members of which are to be chosen by the Muslim World League.

In abiding with the agreed-upon principles and concepts, the participants do emphasize that it is essential for this world dialogue to be open and that its sessions be held periodically.

The participants have extended their profound gratitude to King Abdullah Bin Abdul Aziz Al-Saud, the King of Saudi Arabia for his kind initiation and invitation to this world dialogue. They also expressed their appreciation for the Muslim World League and other bodies that cooperated in organizing this conference. They have applauded the continued efforts made by the league in the fields of dialogue and cooperation among nations and peoples, hoping that the common objectives, for which humankind aspires, are accomplished.  
Issued in Madrid, 15 Rajab 1429 A.H., 18 July 2008 5  
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